

Advent 2

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December 8, 2002

Prayer of the Day

Stir up our hearts, O Lord, to prepare the way for your only Son. By his coming give us strength in our conflicts and shed light on our path through the darkness of this world; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Isaiah 40:1-11

{1} Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. {2} Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins. {3} A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. {4} Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. {5} Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken." {6} A voice says, "Cry out!" And I said, "What shall I cry?" All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field. {7} The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the LORD blows upon it; surely the people are grass. {8} The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever. {9} Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, "Here is your God!" {10} See, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him; his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. {11} He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep

3. *A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God"*: The reading is chosen for the sake of this verse which is quoted (imperfectly) in the Gospel.

the wilderness: Following the settlement of Palestine efforts were made to retain contact with the wilderness of the past. The festivals of Pesach, Weeks and Succoth were tied to the wilderness. Radical groups like the Rechabites and Nazarites sought to live in wilderness fashion either permanently or at least temporarily. The prophets turned to the wilderness as the standard of Yahwistic life, and also as the channel of the Lord's saving power. The wilderness was the means by which Israel would again be cleansed and restored. In this reading the wilderness is viewed as the means by which the exiles from Babylon will be sanctified for return to the Holy Land.

Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13

{1} LORD, you were favorable to your land; you restored the fortunes of Jacob. {2} You forgave the iniquity of your people; you pardoned all their sin. Selah.... {8} Let me hear what God the LORD will speak, for he will speak peace to his people, to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts. {9} Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him, that his glory may dwell in our land. {10} Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other. {11} Faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look down from the sky. {12} The LORD will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase. {13} Righteousness will go before him, and will make a path for his steps.

"The situation of this prayer song comes to light immediately when Psalm 126 is adduced as a parallel text. Both psalms are dated as post-exilic. In their look back to the great salvific deeds of Yahweh they refer, not to the primeval or primarily historical evidences of the power of God (as do Psalms 77 and 80), but to the liberation from exile (cf. Ps. 126:1-3). Psalm 85:1-3 should also be understood as a reference to this deed of God." ¹

8-13: "In vv.8ff. we have a prophetic message overheard in the framework of worship; and transmitted in a solemn ritual. The prophet officiating in worship announces the services of a mediator; he is ready to listen.... The speaker of Ps. 85:8ff. is a [*shalom*] prophet (cf. Jer. 6:14; 8:11; Isa. 57:19)...." ² "For the NT community the ecclesiological meaning of the psalm for the 'wandering people of God' is evident. Psalm 85 stands between salvation accomplished and future, final salvation." ³

2 Peter 3:8-15a

{8} But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like

one day. {9} The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance. {10} But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed. {11} Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, {12} waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire? {13} But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home. {14} Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish; {15} and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation. So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him,

The reading is a response to the question of the scoffers, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since our ancestors died, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation!" In other words, is the Lord ever coming back?

8. *with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day*: "This formula seems to have been a standard exegetical rule, derived from Psalm 90:4..." (RSV: For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past"), but existing as a relatively independent formulation...." ⁴ So, the answer is, "It is difficult, because human time is different from divine time."

10. *the day of the Lord will come like a thief*: "As in all other NT instances of this metaphor (Matthew 24:43-44; Luke 12:39; 1 Thess. 5:2; Rev 3:3; 16:15), derived from Jesus' parable...it conveys both unexpectedness and threat." ⁵

a loud noise: "God's thunderous roar announces his coming as a wrathful warrior, and nature quakes and flees before him (Pss. 18:13-15...; 77:18...; 104:7...; Amos 1:2; Joel 4:16...)." ⁶

11. *what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness*: The real question is not when, but how should we prepare for it whenever it comes. This is further defined in verse 14 as being "at peace, without spot or blemish."

12. *the coming of the day of God*: "Coming" is a translation of *parousian*, in turn the basis for the technical theological word "Parousia," the second coming or return of Jesus at the end of time.

13. *we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home*: The vision of the future is a return to paradisaical perfection, where righteousness is at home.

15. *our beloved brother Paul*: "As in the rather similar case of 1:16-18, the reference to Paul has an apologetic purpose. The author wishes to point out that his own teaching (specifically in 3:14-15a) is in harmony with Paul's because Paul was an important authority for his readers."

the wisdom given to him: Wisdom here is a synonym for "grace."

Mark 1:1-8

{1} The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. {2} As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; {3} the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,'" {4} John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. {5} And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. {6} Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. {7} He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. {8} I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

1. In Matthew and Luke Jesus is identified according to his human descent. Mark (and John) identify Jesus as a manifestation of God. In Mark he is called "the Son of God." In John, the word became flesh.

2. Mark begins his account of "the good news of Jesus Christ" with a prophecy from Isaiah (and Malachi) concerning "my messenger" who will go before you. The prophetic citation is addressed to Jesus ("you"), the Son of God. The point of the messenger's preparation is announced in a mistranslation of Isaiah 40:3, in which the message is announced *in* the desert, while in the Hebrew text the announcement is made *about* the desert.

4. *the wilderness*: The wilderness was a place of rich imagery and meaning for the Israelites. It is the place of wandering, the place of God's presence with his people, the place of Yahwistic ideals. In Mark the wilderness is not so much a geographic location, nor is John's appearance here so much an historical reminiscence, as both are theological statements. The wilderness is the place of salvation. John's appearance there authenticates him as a true messenger of the God who brings salvation in the wilderness.

proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins: John, as an authentic prophet, proclaims repentance and forgiveness. The word "repentance" means to turn around and retrace one's steps. This is a significant image for the wilderness where it is easy to become lost, and retracing one's steps at least gets one back to a starting point. And he proclaims a washing, a cleansing with water, a rare but welcome occasion in the desert, as an image for forgiveness.

6. *John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey:* Mark "believes that John belongs to the prophetic order and is Elijah, whose coming is foretold in Malachi 3:1; 4:5f." ⁷ If there is an historical reminiscence in Luke 7:19-23, "Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?" it seems quite possible that John did not know who Jesus was, at least at this time.

7-8: Whether John identifies the one who comes after him with Jesus is not certain (Mark does, of course). Not only is the one who is coming after John more powerful, he also has a more potent baptism.

Reflection

The lessons view the situation of humankind in terms of the exile. A return from the present conditions to Yahweh's favor is the hope of Yahweh's people. In the first lesson, the offer of comfort, the leveling of the wilderness and the revelation of the glory of Yahweh are indications that restoration and reinstatement are imminent. The Lord will restore his people, and care for them as a shepherd cares for the sheep. The Psalm also speaks of the return of *shalom*, peace, and pardon to the people.

There are those who scoff. To them the second lesson replies, a day for the Lord is like a thousand years for us. We do not know when he will come, but we know that he will come. So, we wait, leading lives of holiness and godliness. Finally, the Gospel tells us that the restoration has begun. The messenger spoken of in Isaiah has come. He has spoken of one more powerful than himself who will baptize us with the Holy Spirit. And this he has done. Each of us has received the gift of the Holy Spirit in our baptisms; now we live in the Spirit each day, waiting for the return of our Lord.

On this Sunday our concern is not be with when paradise will be restored, not even with the signs that point to the nearness of its restoration. Rather, the question for us is always, "what sort of persons ought [we] to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness." We are called to live now as those who will live in the new paradise. Promise, forgiveness, comfort and peace are ours by anticipation, as well as righteousness and faithfulness and steadfast love. We must be patient for the Lord to act. His seeming slowness is a reflection of his patience, his unwillingness that any of us should be lost. Indeed, his patience with us is our hope of salvation.

Hymns ⁸

With One Voice (e.g. 762v), Hymnal Supplement 1991 (e.g. 725s) and LBW (e.g. 32).

E=Entrance; D=Hymn of the Day; I=First Lesson, II=Psalm; II=Second Lesson; G=Gospel

26 --E--Prepare the Royal
36 --D--On Jordan's Banks
7 --I--Climb to the
29 --I--Comfort, Comfort
629v --I--All Earth Is

630v --I--Light One Candle
318 --II--The Lord Will
647v --G--When Jesus Came
556, 519, 25, 775s, 33

Prayers of the People ⁹

A: Christ's baptism of the Spirit eclipses the baptism of John. Yet, we hear John's call for Advent readiness. As those who still fall short, we plead, "O God of mercy," and respond, C: Incline to us.

A: For the church often cold, bound and old, that stony disposition be buried and the Spirit's fresh feeling return. O God of mercy. C: Incline to us.

A: For warring factions in our world, that reason be given place, raging voices stilled, and unseemly violence be put away. O God of mercy. C: Incline to us.

A: For the prevailing employment tempest: over-work, under-work, loss of work, and want of work, that fullness and balance be restored. O God of mercy. C: Incline to us.

A: For seniors in terminal years who beg for more of life. O God of mercy. C: Incline to us.

A: For youth who, in their haste to live, often miss the path of God. O God of mercy. C: Incline to us.

A: For those who teach and those who learn the measure and way of Christ. O God of mercy. C: Incline to us.

P: Make us, O God, the welcome in Christ that an estranged world seeks and needs. Let love be in our lives and an Advent morning arise for all. C: Amen.

OR [10](#)

Presider or deacon

As we prepare for Jesus to come among us, let us offer prayers to God who feeds his flock like a shepherd.

Deacon or other leader

For the coming of Jesus Christ in power and glory. For the coming of Wisdom to teach and guide us. For the coming of Emmanuel, the hope of all the peoples. For the peace of the world, and for our unity in Christ. For *N* our bishop and all bishops, for the presbyters, for the deacons and all who minister in Christ, and for all the holy people of God. For the church throughout the world and the faithful in every place. For the leaders of the nations and all in authority. For justice, peace, and freedom among peoples of the earth. For travelers, for the sick and the suffering, for the hungry and the oppressed, and for those in prison. For the dying and the dead. For our deliverance from all affliction, strife, and need. Joining our voices with the blessed Virgin Mary and with all the saints and angels of God, let us offer ourselves and one another to the living God through Christ. **To you, O Lord.**

Presider

O Key of David, scepter of the house of Israel, who opens and none can shut, who shuts and none can open, come and free the captives from prison, who sit in darkness and the shadow of death. Glory to you for ever.

Notes

¹ Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60-150: A Commentary*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989, p. 174.

² *Ibid* Ibid., p. 176.

³ *Ibid* Ibid., p. 177.

⁴ Richard J. Bauckham, *Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 50: Jude, 2 Peter*. Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1983, p. 306.

⁵ *Ibid* Ibid., pp. 314f.

⁶ *Ibid* Ibid., p. 315.

⁷ Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*. New York: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1955, p. 156.

⁸ <http://www.worship.ca/text/wpch0203.txt>

⁹ http://www.worship.on.ca/text/inter_b1.txt

¹⁰ <http://members.cox.net/oplater/prayer.htm>